

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



June 1992 No 179

A FIELD NAT. AT THE PROM.

It was late afternoon when I arrived at the entrance to Wilson's Promontory National Park. A quick look at the notice board showed me that the park staff had all gone home but the campers could select sites for the night at the Tidal River camping village and pay camp fees next morning. Another 20-odd km along the nice sealed road brought me down the magnificent west coast of the promontory to the superb camping area at Tidal River. I knew that Grace and Arie would have arrived earlier in the afternoon and would be well set up by now with their fold-out tent-trailer and the tent for Mum and Mollie.

Grace had thoughtfully left a note for me at the only shop in the 50 000 ha park - "STAN We are at 34th Avenue; G.R. A.W. & R.R.".

There was still room for my small car and my tiny tent in the sandy gap between the ti-trees, close to the amenities block and to "ramp 4" - one of the ten sandy paths that lead to the wide and shallow beach of Norman Bay. Under the annexe of the camper trailer we enjoyed a delectable tea cooked by Arie, a quiet chat, then all turned in for an early night.

Tuesday morning I was up, breakfasted quietly, and down to the beach by 7 am. The only life there seemed to be the usual Silver Gulls, a few Pacific Gulls and a couple of glossy black ravens. The information centre later confirmed my guess that they would be Forest Ravens, the same as the only corvids that inhabit Tasmania. They also inhabit Cape Otway, and strangely, an isolated area in the new England Ranges of northern N.S.W. Two or three hundred metres along to my right a tiny coffee-coloured stream wended its way out over the wet sand. So now I had found the Tidal River I had heard of from my sisters and brothers and their families for over 40 years!

I followed it up for a short distance, to a sturdy footbridge, beyond which the wee stream flows out of a marshy, reedy area where 13 Black Ducks were working their way upstream finding breakfast in the shallow water, while a snow-white Great Egret fished there too, where the water flowed from the marsh on to the sand. The path I found there is well made, board walks, a couple of poolside fishing "jetties" alternating with the gravel and firm ground, as it leads in a semicircle through a variety of coastal habitats back to the car park opposite the shop and

information centre. Lots of tiny brown Fairy Wrens and one superb male still dressed in his best blue and black plumage confidently waited, sometimes until I could almost reach out and touch them. In the bush nearer the car park were lots of Crimson Rosellas, Little Wattle Birds and Rainbow Lorikeets. I was not so pleased to identify a dozen or more medium-sized birds in a tiny patch of rainforest beside the stream as being the ever-present feral Starlings.

I was even less pleased later, when a honeyeater I was trying to identify fled the blossoming banksia on the arrival of a single Starling. The little natives must feel like fugitives in their own land when a squadron of Starlings swoop into their habitat.

Stan Bruton

B.O.C. CAMPOUT - WYPERFELD

It was great to have the chance to return to Wyperfeld. It really is a terrific natural area. I got a surprise when the camp sign pointed down a track across a treeless paddock, but over the next rise lay a camp set in mallees, and swarming with people.

We found a campsite, and I immediately, as always, took a short stroll to see what birds dominated the camping area. White-browed Woodswallows chirped overhead, swirling around in large numbers. I knew I would need to get used to their company for the three days. Yellow-Plumed Honeyeaters noisily inhabited the Yellow and Narrow-leaved Red Mallees that clothed the camping area, and Yellow-rumped Pardalotes whistled happily in the Mallees. I appreciated being able to look at a Pardalote in the mallee, as you can admire its colours, unlike the Spotted Pardalotes in the tall forests. Red-capped Robins were quite numerous in the camp area. Very numerous in fact. A Red-capped Robin perched on a dead branch of Scrub Cypress was a memorable, and common sight. Sometimes two or three could be seen at once, the females less obvious, but still there. Weebills were very common, and Yellow Thornbills were easy to find if you looked.

In the vicinity at the camp ground we were at, there were many parrots. Mallee Ringnecks were quite common. Mulga Parrots were in smaller numbers but still seen by many, and Regent parrots whipped overhead from time to time, as well as lazy flocks of Pink Cockatoos. White Cockatoos, Galahs and Red-rumped Parrots were all very common. Singing, Spiny-cheeked and White-plumed Honeyeaters all occurred there too, and I spotted a couple of Inland Thornbills.

On the rise to the east of the camp, I set out and found a wonderful array of birds. Southern Scrub-robins were singing in a dead tree, making a pleasant din, and two Mulga Parrots dropped in at the tree, giving a brilliant view. My back to the sunlight, the male showing off his orange and yellow belly, the bagpipes (yes, the bagpipes!) wailing soft-

ly in the background. It was a very memorable experience, I tell you.

A little later I called up a pair of Scrub-robins, which circled me on the ground - quite a sight. They seemed horribly confused. They kept at opposite sides of their circle, keeping me between them as they hopped around in a circle. Perhaps each thought the other was calling.

Peaceful Doves, Splendid Wrens, (I didn't see a coloured male), Hooded Robins, White-eared Honeyeaters and a Little Falcon, as well as a flock of White-browed Babblers were seen as well as all of the birds previously mentioned.



We drove to the Lowan Track. We saw mallee Ringnecks and Pink Cockatoos on the way, but no Mallee Fowl. Those who went the day before and the day after saw them, though.

We took, too, the Bambruk Walk. Mallee Ringnecks, Weebills, White-eared Honeyeaters and Red-rumped Parrots are common on the way to Lake Bambruck. Also seen along the way were some Emus, Splendid Wrens (no coloured males!), Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Black-winged Currawongs, White-rumped Miners, Inland Thornbills and more common birds.

At the lake we soon found the Regent Parrots, which calmly let us watch them. A pair of Pink Cockatoos also appeared. Brown Treecreepers, Striated Pardalotes and numerous Tree Martins also lived in Lake Bambruck's redgums. Grey Butcherbirds and two or more pairs of Pink Cockatoos were seen on the way home, along with many of the aforementioned.

The next day we took on the Desert walk. The 6 kilometres seemed like 10, and we didn't take lunch. On this walk allow plenty of time. We travelled through open low heath, porcupine floored mallee, stands of Narrow-leaved Red Mallee, a Black Box woodland, sand hills of banksias and other interesting shrubs, sand hills of Yellow Mallee, stands of melaleucas, Scrub Cypress groves, scattered stands of Yellow Gums and everything in between.

This walk had plenty of interesting birds. Splendid Wrens and Red-capped Robins were common, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters had a singalong, and the Yellow-rumped Pardalotes joined in. Three new species for the trip were seen here. A Tawny-crowned Honeyeater in the heaths, two Chestnut-rumped Thornbills in the mallee scrub, their grey backs camouflaging well against the dead wood, and two White-fronted Honeyeaters, one on a sand ridge and another in the next flat. The White-fronted Honeyeaters were noisy and restless and their white head gives their plumage an interesting effect.

From the hills of this walk there are sweeping views of the mallee. You cannot see any sign of human habitation. No dams, farms, roads or buildings. The hills of the Big Desert are relatively nearby and you can see Flagstaff Hill and Eastern Lookout, as well as the different habitats that Wyperfeld has to offer.

A Gilbert's Whistler, and interestingly enough, a male Rufous Whistler, were seen near the camp and so was a Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo.

So the White-backed Swallows on the road out bid us farewell, adding to the two I had seen near the camp. And the camp will be remembered for its ever-present great flocks of White-browed Woodswallows which were indescribably numerous among the Yellow Mallees, for its noisy groups of



Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters, the whistling Yellow-rumped Pardalotes, the Red-capped Robins sitting around on dead branches, the crazy Scrub-robins, the frenetic Regent Parrots, the Mallee Ringnecks, the friendly wrens, and the Mulga Parrots in the morning sunlight set in the wailing cry of bagpipes. It's a place you must return to.

Simon Kennedy

INTERNATIONAL DAWN CHORUS DAY

Sunday 3rd May was International Dawn Chorus Day. The idea came from the Aubon Wildlife Trust, West Midland, England.

Bird Watchers all around the globe were encouraged to be out at dawn and ready for the first call.

Of course the Castlemaine Field Naturalists were not caught napping, and eleven members gathered at the Loddon River at that magic time of a new day. It was overcast, mild, and incredibly calm and quiet.

The Magpies broke the silence at exactly 6.17 am. closely followed by the Kookaburras. (In the town they call much earlier.)

From then on there were twitterings from all directions. By 6.45 it was possible to identify some birds in flight.

A small fire boiled the billy, and another fire made perfect toasted crumpets - some folks also enjoyed hot porridge with cream and sugar!

The list for 2½ hours was

White-faced Heron	Welcome Swallows	Yellow-rumped Thornbills
Galahs	Tree Martins	White-throat. Treecreepers
Long-billed Corellas	Yellow Robin	Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters
Crimson Rosellas	Jacky Winter	Fuscous Honeyeaters
Eastern Rosellas	Grey Fantail	White-naped Honeyeaters
Red-rumped Parrots	Blackbird	Spotted Pardalotes
Common Bronzewing	Restless Flycatcher	Magpies
Kingfisher	White-browed Scrubwrens	Australian Raven
Kookaburras	Blue Wrens	

M. Oliver.

KOALA PARK OUTING

The afternoon was fine, if a little cool, and the light out at the park was quite beautiful after the rain, when about 20 of us went out to the Koala Park last month. It was very quiet, tho' there were quite a few birds about, especially near the rocks in the north end of the park.

A bit further on and old dead tree in a crack in the rock caught peoples interest.

On the north-western corner of the park, the party came out from among wattles and gum saplings, to an area of flat rock from which there are some beautiful views right over past Tarrengower to the Pyrenees. There's a rock pool in the top of which ought to prove a good spot for bird watching in the late afternoon, when small birds are bathing and drinking.

As some of us started on the south track, someone called us back. He had heard birds calling, and finally spotted them drinking and bathing in a pool in the fork of a tree. With the sun behind the tree, the spray lit up in the sunlight as the birds splashed.

Down near the footbridge there were a number of little birds, including Goldfinches and Red-browed Firetails, but it was here that several saw a raptor that they felt couldn't be what it seemed. A check on the bird book confirmed that it had to be a Black Kite (or Fork-tailed Kite). Apparently they have been seen near Tarrengower.

Only one Koala was seen, but over afternoon tea, quite a few stories were told of of encounters with koalas, including one Englishman who at that time was quite recently arrived in Australia. He was walking along the roadside in the dark. There were occasional street lights, and someone joined him when he was in a patch that was quite dark. He could hear the person walking and started a conversation, but got no response. When they got to the next street light he found his companion to be a Koala! He says he hadn't even been to the pub.

The bird list for the afternoon was

Wedgetail Eagle	Superb Blue Wren	White-naped Honeyeater
Little Eagle	White-throated Treecreeper	Spotted Pardalote
Black Kite	Brown Thornbill	Striated Pardalote
Crimson Rosella	Striated Thornbill	Red-browed Finch
Kookaburra	Buff-rumped Thornbill	Goldfinch
Flame Robin	Red Wattlebird	White-winged Chough
Scarlet Robin	White-eared Honeyeater	Grey Currawong
Golden Whistler	Brown-headed Honeyeater	Magpie
Grey Shrikethrush	White-naped Honeyeater	Australian Raven

Rita Mills

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS' REVENGE (ON SOUTH AFRICA)

Accustomed as we are to the continuing invasion of our native bush by vigorous competitors from South Africa such as Cape Broom, Boxthorn and Capeweed, it is interesting to find that in South Africa the boot, as it were, is on the other foot. According to an article in New Scientist, (Feb 15, 1992) many South Africans are becoming increasingly concerned that an area near the Cape which supports a complex community known as the fynbos (Fine Bush) is being successfully invaded by competitive plant species from Australia.

Because of the lack of timber in this area, most indigenous species being small, early European colonists obtained fast-growing species from other parts of the world, including Australia. These included several acacia species vis *longifolia*, *saligna*, *cyclops* and *mearnsii*. *Hakea sericea* was another introduction which now forms dense thickets on mountain sides. Being legumes, the acacias were able to compete very successfully in the poor soils of the region, giving rise to concern that the fynbos could be lost unless something could be done to save it. As the fynbos contains a vast number of species, including Heathers, Pelargoniums and Proteas, South African Botanists were distinctly worried. On Table Mountain alone over 1470 different plant species have been recorded, more than may be found in the whole of the British Isles.

In efforts to contain the spread, weeding, spraying and slashing have had little effect. Attempts have been made to locate biological control agents which might assist. Researchers have sought suitable agents in Australia and have come up with some likely candidates. One is a gall-forming wasp which attacks *A. longifolia*, and which is assisted by a seed-boring weevil. Another agent is a fungus which attacks *A. saligna* causing galls to form instead of flower buds.

However the promising effect of the fungus has not pleased everyone.

There are some farmers who rely on *A. saligna* as cattle fodder, while in other areas of poor soil it was proving successful as a soil protection and in enriching soils with nitrogen enabling other crops to grow. Those who relied on the Acacia for a living tended to be black, while those who pressed for its destruction tended to be middle-class whites, showing once again that conservation measures are rarely simple.

G. Broadway

THE MONTH OF APRIL AT SANDON

Birds seen at the bird bath were

Crimson Rosellas	Striated Thornbills	Fuscous Honeyeaters
Scarlet Robins (pair)	Brown Thornbills	White-naped Honeyeaters
Yellow Robins	White-throated	White-plumed Honeyeaters
Grey Shrike-thrush	Treecreepers	Striated Pardalotes
Grey fantail (pair)	Brown-headed Honeyeaters	Spotted Pardalotes
Wrens	Yellow-faced Honeyeaters	Silveryeyes (pair)
Buff-rumped Thornbills	White-eared Honeyeaters	

Birds seen on the property were

Masked Lapwings	Golden Whistler (im'ure)	Red Wattlebird (Pair)
Eastern Rosellas (pr)	Rufous Whistler (pair)	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Owlet Nightjar	Restless Flycatcher	Diamond Firetail (pair)
Welcome Swallow (pair)	Willie Wagtail (pair)	White-winged Choughs
Black-faced Cuckoo-shr	Speckled Warbler	Magpies
Hooded Robin	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Grey Currawong
Crested Shrike-tit	Varied Sittellas	Australian Raven

Susanna Starr

OBSERVATIONS

ORCHIDS IN FLOWER. (*Pterostylis nana*) from a footpath in Kaweka was displayed at the May meeting. (FB) A Midge Orchid (*Genoplesium nigricans*) had been seen in flower in Kalimna, east of Kalimna Point. (EP)

PIED CURRAWONGS had been at Castlemaine North before moving off. They are not usually seen in this area. (RM)

AUSTRALIAN RAVENS have also been seen for several days at Castlemaine North. Little Ravens have also been present, so it has been possible to compare the calls of each. (RM)

HAWK IN HUNTER STREET was seen on the ground, near Buda. At first it was mistaken for a Bronzewing. It was a dark colour above, with a plain brown breast, and it had a blackbird in its clutches. Apparently the burden was too great for it to carry. (RH) Can any reader identify it?

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 12 June. DESERT WANDERINGS AND DESERT PLANTS Talk by John Lindner. High School at 8.00 pm.

Sat 13 June. BULLARTO RESERVOIR. Fungi and birds. Meet SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 or Guildford PO. at 1.40 pm. Take warm clothing. Leader: E Perkins.

Thurs 18 June. THURSDAY EXCURSION. CFNC/U3A birdwatching excursion. Meet Cont. Ed. car park, Templeton St at 9.30 am. Leader: G Broadway.

Thurs 26 June. BUSINESS MEETING 7.30 pm at 38 Campbell Street.

Fri 10 July. LAMINTON NATIONAL PARK. Video. 8 pm at High School.

Sat 11 July. DUNOLLY and INGLEWOOD. Dunolly nature trail and Inglewood botanic gardens. Meet 27 Doveton St at 9.30. or Maldon PO at 9.45 am.

Thurs 16 July. THURSDAY EXCURSION. Joint CFNC/U3A birdwatching outing. Meet Cont Ed. car park, Templeton St at 9.30 am. Leader: M Oliver.

Fri 14 Aug. WILDFLOWERS AND BIRDS OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA with Chris Morris

Sat 15 Aug. BIRDWATCHING BEHIND MT TARRENGOWER. Leader: M Oliver

22-23 Aug. KOOLAMURT CAMPOUT A WVFNC campout on the outskirts of Bendigo, organised by Bendigo FNC. Bunk style accomodation. Self cater. Matresses supplied. Cost \$6 per head per night. Sunday barbecue - cost \$5.

Fri 13 Nov. FLOWERS, FEATHERS AND FUN. Speaker is Reg Johnson.

SUPPER: June: E Duffin & M Oliver Jul: E & F Blake

NOTES FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING

LONG SWAMP. This Club will support the Long Swamp Purchase Appeal. Long Swamp, in the Moolort Plains, was a Brolga breeding area before it was drained in the 1960s. The Club will make a donation of \$150. Club members may wish to make a donation also. Donations to the Victorian Conservation Trust are tax deductible, and you may, if you wish, ask the Trust to consider using the money towards purchase of Long Swamp.

CAMEL RIDES THROUGH PILCHER'S BRIDGE FAUNA AND FLORA RESERVE. The Club is seeking information from the Deptrtment of Conservation and Environment about a proposal to use the Pilcher's Bridge Fauna and Flora Reserve as a location for camel rides.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450.